



Ambassador Linton F. Brooks
Remarks to the NNSA staff
July 23, 2002

Introduction

I'm Linton Brooks and as of July 9 I am the acting Administrator of NNSA. I thought I should introduce myself, tell you who I am, how I see my job, and how I'll be approaching it. I also want to give you a chance to ask questions. Before I start, need to make three points:

- First, I am honored – and a bit stunned – by the chance to lead an important organization of such dedicated people.
- Second, I think John Gordon is a tough act to follow. He is the reason I came to NNSA and I expect to continue much of what he was doing. In particular I'm committed to the reengineering process and to the initiatives on diversity that John started.
- Third, I don't know how long I'll be in this job, but it will almost certainly be through early spring. That's a long time in Washington, far too long to let an organization drift. Given that, I don't expect to defer things "waiting for the permanent replacement." I'm what we've got and I plan to act as though I was going to be here forever.

Who am I?

For forty-three years I've been involved in national security in the military, in government, and at an FFRDC supporting the Navy. The first twenty years were mostly operational: destroyers and nuclear submarines. I've been in Washington since 1979. I've served on the Navy Staff, OSD, State, ACDA, and NSC. Most jobs had strategy, policy, arms control, or nuclear in their titles. I negotiated START I and START II (which is why I get to call myself Ambassador). I was Assistant Director of ACDA at end of first Bush Administration

During the Clinton years I was a Vice President at Center for Naval Analyses, doing policy and strategy work for Navy. I've also served on various study panels including some for DOE labs. Finally, since last October, I've been the Deputy Administrator for Nuclear Nonproliferation.

No one is defined only by his or her work. I'm also a married man who values family, an avid theater buff, and an avid reader. I'm interested in lots of things. I like people a lot (I'm also not as good as remembering names as I should be). I'm not terribly formal – if you are wearing a suit coat in my office, it's because you're cold.

Finally, I have a bit of a reputation as a workaholic. It's not entirely unfair, but I don't think of it as particularly admirable. I don't expect others to work horrendous hours and I'm not particularly impressed when they do so on a routine basis.

How I see my job

Any front office has to do four things:

1. Provide overall strategic vision and direction
2. Make sure people are taken care of
3. Deal with external stakeholders
4. Make the trains run on time

Let me say a little about each. By strategic vision I do not mean formal documents. They have their place, but they aren't central. Instead I mean continuous efforts to ensure we all have the same understanding of where we are going, what we are trying to do, and how we will approach our task. This implies a good deal of two-way communication. You will find that I value sharing information a lot. I see establishing and communicating a consistent direction for the organization as my most important task, and one that I must do personally.

If strategic vision is the most important task of a front office, taking care of people is a very close second. Taking care of people means giving them the tools and the training and the resources to do the job. It means treating them fairly and helping them advance. But above all, in my view, taking care of people means treating them with respect.

I am appalled that the people who were called public servants in my youth are now called bureaucrats. I think it is unfortunate and wrong when politicians campaign against "Washington" as though the career government was some kind of alien life form.

Both the management literature and my own experience teaches me that having meaningful work to do and being respected for doing it are the two most important elements in job satisfaction. We had both of those under General Gordon and we're going to have them under me. I have a reputation as being relatively easy going and not much makes me grumpy. But I will not tolerate people in NNSA not being treated with respect by their NNSA colleagues, their DOE colleagues, their interagency colleagues, or anyone else.

The third function of a front office is keeping touch with external stakeholders. This is pretty straightforward in concept, though hard in practice. I'm fortunate that I have worked with almost all of the senior officials of this Administration in the past as well as with many of the senior folks at the labs. I'm also fortunate that I have such strong colleagues within NNSA to help me in this area.

Finally, a front office needs to make the trains run on time. When I say, “make the trains run on time,” I don’t just mean tickler systems and checking up on when papers are due. That’s important and I want us to be good at it, but Steve Matts and Bill Barker handle it for me. What a front office needs to do is remove the bureaucratic obstacles that keep people from carrying out the mission. That’s one of the goals of reengineering and one I plan to push.

The approaches I bring to the job

I burdened you with my biography because – like everyone in this room – what I’ve done in the past is part of who I am. I don’t have any preconceptions about specific issues (outside of NN), but I’ve been leading people and running organizations for most of my life. I have formed some pretty strong opinions about how to deal with people and issues. It seems only fair to tell you about them in advance.

First and most important, from every job I’ve ever had, I’ve learned that people are what matter. I’ve already talked about that a bit, but nothing I say is as good as what John Gordon wrote in the Diversity Statement:

We are “...committed to the goals of fairness, equity, and respect for people [and] committed to a work environment that is free from discrimination and harassment, and supportive of all employees.”

John meant that and so do I.

From decades in the military, I’ve learned to value the chain of command. But you need to understand what I mean by that:

- Direction only comes via the formal chain of command. If anyone other than the front office and my direct reports ever gets direction or tasking from me, I’ve screwed up.
- But information can flow in many directions. I don’t think it violates the chain of command if I ask a direct information question of an expert rather than of his boss. I don’t think it violates the chain of command if I send information of broad interest to people simultaneously, rather than passing it down through multiple intermediates. I don’t think it violates the chain of command if I gather people from different levels in the organization to brainstorm about issues.

I’ve learned another thing in my time in the military, and that is to value loyalty. Once again, you need to understand what I mean. Loyalty works both up and down. Loyalty up means I argue as strongly as possible with my boss before a decision is made, but after it is made I carry it out with equal enthusiasm whether the call went my way or not. Loyalty down means I support and protect my subordinates and don’t try to dodge responsibility by blaming them when things go wrong. You’ll see both kinds of loyalty from me and I’ll expect to see both kinds from you.

Closely related to loyalty is the willingness to tell the boss unpleasant news and to listen to unpleasant news your self. I value candor a lot and I don't shoot messengers. A submarine I rode briefly once ran aground because the navigator had made it clear to his subordinates that he didn't want his decisions questioned. So when he laid down a track that went right through a submerged mounted, they didn't question it. People who bring you bad news are not your enemies. I don't shoot messengers.

From my time in START, I've learned the importance of keeping clear what problem you are solving while dealing with myriads of details. If we don't constantly focus on where we want to go, we won't be able to distinguish the important from the mundane. A wise colleague of mine often says that the commonest form of stupidity is forgetting what you are trying to do. We all have to try not to fall into that trap.

From eight years at an FFRDC – an organization with the same legal status as the national labs – I've learned that when those organizations are treated like partners rather than beltway bandits everyone benefits. I don't mean to minimize the importance of federal oversight, but you'll find I have a strong bias in favor of making extensive and effective use of the historic special relationship between the labs and the government.

From many years in the interagency process, I've learned the value of collegiality and sharing information. Sooner or later attempts to cut others out will backfire. You will find that I expect us to get high marks in "plays nicely with others."

Spending the eight years before I came here in an organization that is full of creative PhDs has made me really value new ideas. Most good ideas come from non-managers and I want to make sure we tap into those ideas.

Years in the bureaucracy have convinced me that Dilbert really is a documentary but we can all live with it. We have to work to make things better, but bureaucracy is always going to be frustrating. I'll try not to let it get to me and I hope you'll do the same.

Finally, and most importantly, my time here these past few months has given me an immense respect for the people and programs of NNSA. That's why I'm so honored to have the chance to lead this organization.

Summing up

So that's who I am, how I see the job, and the predispositions I bring to it. But there is one more important thing about me, which I suspect most of you share. I want to make a difference, to really make a contribution to America's security. Put bluntly, I didn't sign up for a significant pay cut and a longer commute in order to be irrelevant.

I'm happy about this job because I know that it will involve working with very good people doing very important work. Not everybody gets the chance to make a difference. We do. Not everybody gets the chance to make the country and the world safer. We do. Not everybody

gets the chance to work with exciting technology and to adapt that technology to an important mission. We do.

I'm proud to be a part of this organization, thrilled at the opportunities before us, and eager to get started.